

SMS MARKETING DEMYSTIFIED



ONTRAPORT

ABOUT THIS EBOOK

SMS Marketing Demystified

The ubiquity of mobile phones has given rise to arguably the most effective, yet underutilized, direct marketing channel accessible to entrepreneurs and small business owners: SMS Marketing. Though SMS is far from uncharted marketing territory, it's regrettably neglected far too often in favor of social media or email marketing — both of which can be strengthened when paired with text messaging. In this guide, we'll break down the steps to upping your ROI by engaging your audience with relevant, targeted text messaging. Read on, and reap the benefits of SMS in your quiver of marketing tools.

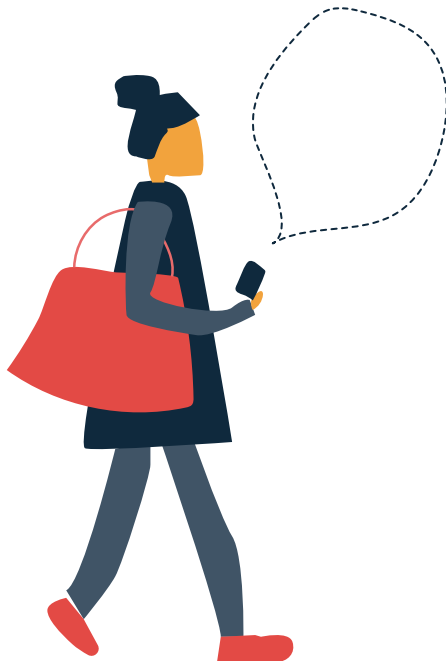




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LIFTING THE VEIL

People are inextricably tied to their cell phones. From millennials to baby boomers, everyone's got one, and they're texting more than ever before.

Consequently, business has evolved to become mobile friendly — scaling down to the small screen. Adjoining this technological ubiquity is the mentality that if it can't be opened on a phone, it probably isn't worth looking at. For that reason, of all the marketing channels available to reach consumers today, one stands out above the rest.

Note: SMS = Short Message Service

As it stands, the mobile medium represents a massive white space in marketing. It's hard to believe an astounding 64% of businesses can be doing more to reach out to customers via SMS.

Why is that?

The reason is that three mighty misconceptions about SMS linger in the entrepreneurial space:

1. It's expensive.
2. It can't be personalized.
3. It can't be tracked.
4. It's spammy.

The technology and marketing platforms available today are evidence enough to debunk the first three. It's never been easier or cheaper to target, segment and track lead activity with SMS. As for SMS being spammy, only in the wrong hands; it all boils down to permission, content, and proper sending practices — all of which we'll cover in this ebook.

The New Wellspring of ROI

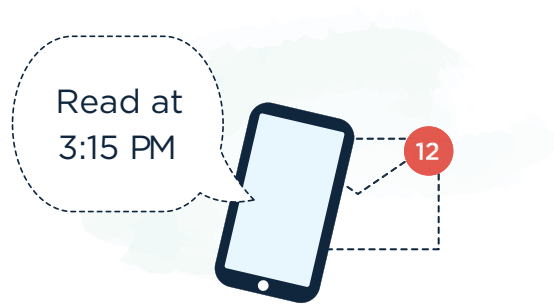
Entrepreneurs are always looking for the best possible way to extend their reach, to grab people's attention no matter where they are or what they're doing.

Those who embrace the true value of SMS will find themselves at a competitive advantage. Transcending all other marketing mediums, SMS has everything a business owner or marketer could want: It's modern, it's environmentally conscious, and your audience is all but guaranteed to get your message.



Did you know? 80% of consumers say they have not been marketed to via SMS by their favorite brands.

SMS offers these 10 competitive advantages:



Accessibility

90% of SMS messages are read within three minutes upon receiving them

Convenience

76% of people report that they're more likely to read a message sooner if it's an SMS message rather than an email.



Immediacy

SMS delivery is immediate but requires no immediacy on your part. With an average send time of seven seconds, it trumps all other mediums with its lightning-fast delivery.

Exclusivity

There's nothing like the feeling that you're a member of a special club with special perks. Offering a seemingly exclusive experience builds brand loyalty and compels people to spread the word about your products or services.

Affordability

Cheap but profitable, SMS marketers have seen an increase of 200% ROI over any other marketing channel.



Unparalleled engagement

The familiar buzz or chime of an incoming text message triggers an almost instinctive knee-jerk reaction. With an engagement rate of six to eight times higher than email marketing, no other medium comes close.

An easy exit door

SMS short codes have opened new doors to easy opt-out. Should anyone want to unsubscribe from an SMS campaign, a one-letter reply is all it takes.

No send barrier

Unlike email and other mediums, SMS isn't riddled with hurdles such as authenticators or spam filters, and your reputation never comes into question as there is no sender score required.

Broader reach

Given the ubiquity of smartphone usage worldwide, SMS isn't limited to just one or two age brackets, countries or demographics; it encompasses them all.

Two-way communication

Messages don't stop on the receiving end. SMS introduces interactivity (and fun) to your campaigns. Polls and questionnaires allow for your audience to engage with you, giving you a grand opportunity to feed your community.



SMS: A Multipurpose Marketing Medium

The power of SMS lies in its flexibility.

An SMS message campaign can effectively stand on its own while individual messages can be seamlessly integrated into overarching campaigns. Ask yourself what your marketing goals are and how an SMS campaign can take you there. Here are a few proven ways to tie SMS in with your efforts:

- Product promotion
- Event promotion
- Alerts/Updates
- Appointment reminders
- Event interaction
- Exclusive one-off messages
- Content releases
- Customer service
- Birthday and holiday greetings and discounts
- Questionnaires

Though SMS isn't necessarily a one-size-fits-all solution, consider it just one more arrow in your marketing quiver.

CHAPTER 2

BEFORE YOU SEND



Create Value

You don't own your brand; your audience does.

Contacts' phone numbers are a hot commodity; they're a gateway into their personal space. When people hand over their digits, they're giving you something of great value.. Reciprocate their generosity by rewarding them each time you send a message their way — something that reminds them that they're special.

Assess your target market's wants and needs (see Segment below) to determine what's valuable to your subscribers. Send them gold nuggets of info and/or special content, discounts and offers unique to them.

Exclusivity counts. Stay away from sending the same messages featured in your other marketing channels. There's no appeal to an offer available to all. Last but not least, the inherent value of your message more than doubles when you create a sense of urgency. Setting a time limit or expiration date ensures your subscribers react quickly.

Don't:

- Bombard your subscribers with messages.
- Send repetitive content.
- Always try to sell something.

Remember, SMS is a unique way to build a relationship with your subscribers. Your SMS recipients should be bummed to miss a message from you. To that end, kind gestures such as [birthday and holiday greetings](#) go a long way. They're reminders that you're thinking of them as human beings and not just dollars gained or lost.

You'll find people will stick around as long as you keep your promises and deliver something they'll be stoked to see.



Get Explicit Permission

Take it from promising brands that have been buried by hefty fines, sending without explicit permission has consequences.

Acquire your SMS contacts honestly. Marketing to people who actually want to hear from you has its merits. A good list takes time to build but, in the end, your engagement rates will skyrocket.

Though it seems like a harmless act, refrain from ever buying a list of phone numbers, and don't presume that people who have given you their cell number, whether on a form, over the phone or in person, has given you the green light to fire SMS messages at them. The legal ramifications of blind firing SMS messages to anyone whose number you have can cause irreparable damage to your brand image and reputation, making your business look spammy and intrusive.

So what constitutes permission?

Permission to send SMS to someone can be obtained by:

- An opt-in form asking for explicit, written consent OR
- Sending a keyword via SMS to a specific number or shortcode you designate.

On your opt-in forms or opt-in instructions, be transparent about exactly what subscribers should expect from you (see Set Clear Expectations). It also helps to gather other pertinent information, such as country or time zone, to secure appropriate segmentation and timing for your texts.

Segment

Mobile customers themselves aren't a market segment. They are just one channel of engagement in what should be an overarching marketing effort across multiple platforms.

Relevance is paramount. Sending the right messages to the right customers will have them thanking you rather than scratching their heads. They won't feel as though they're being merely marketed to but rather that you're actively catering to their wants and needs.



To maximize your SMS marketing potential, ask yourself what compels people to seek your business and which demographic you aim to serve. Then tap into those needs, wants and desires and tailor your messages accordingly.

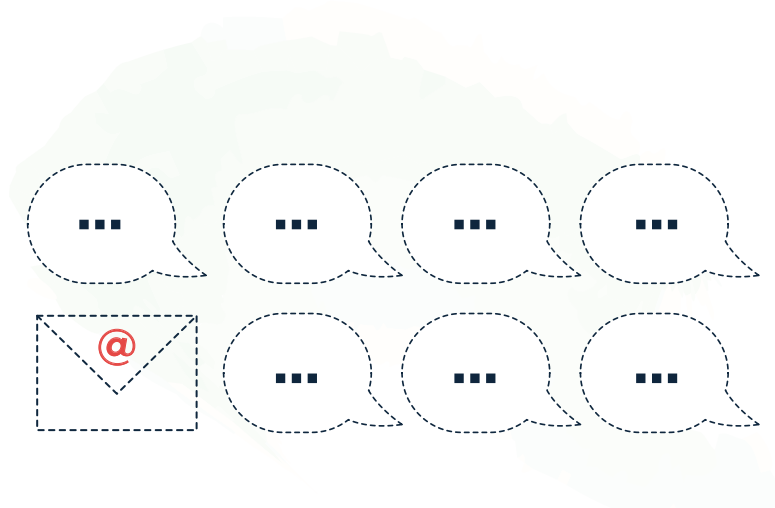
Why do people go to Starbucks? The coffee, sure, but there are plenty of other reasons: breakfast, meet-ups with friends, brainstorming, solitude, to write screenplays, an afternoon pick-me-up, shelter from the cold, boredom. The list goes on.

It's up to you to figure out the best way to compartmentalize your contacts and determine what type of content your customers want. Once you've established the various reasons leads and customers give you their info, you're ready to text them.

Fun fact: Many CRMs let you link a cell phone number to a customer profile wherein their interests and purchase history are stored — all of which you can leverage to send them nuggets that send them flocking to your website. They also reduce the need to gather more info via text message from them later.

Set clear expectations

Be clear on what type of content subscribers should expect to receive. You're setting a precedent that instills trust. As with any agreement you enter into with someone, communicate your intention. Your SMS subscribers should anticipate the frequency of your messages as well as the type of content within. Don't blindside them. SMS subscriptions are delicate. Be mindful of what content may be better served by a medium outside of SMS.



CHAPTER 3

WRITING YOUR CONTENT

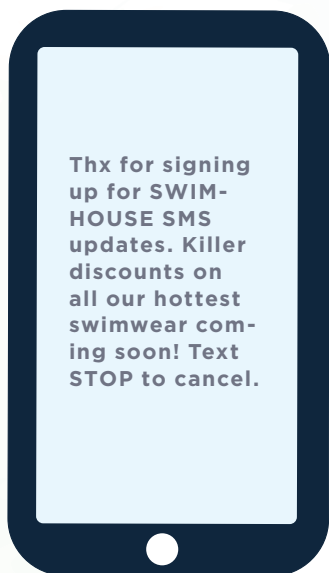


KEEP IT BRIEF

Brevity is your new best friend.

Don't say in 10 sentences what you can say in 10 words. Your standard SMS tops out at 160 characters, so make that character limit count by getting straight to the point, without leaving your subscribers scratching their heads on the purpose/motive of what you sent them. Leads and customers are easily turned off by wordy messages or ambiguity.

When including links in your SMS messages, use URL shorteners like Goo.gl or Bit.ly to save space. Raw URLs are often long and unsightly, ruining the aesthetic of your message.



In your efforts to keep your messages brief, you may be tempted to use shorthand SMS lingo, but try to only do so sparingly and when appropriate. As a business, you have an image of professionalism to maintain. Odds are, not everyone you're marketing to "gets" or tolerates your "BTWs." As such, use very obvious shorthand if necessary, to avoid reaching your character limit.

Make it personal

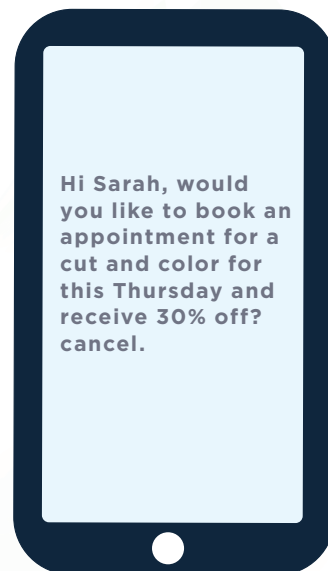
How often have you gotten a text from an unknown number only to reply “who is this?” You may even be conditioned to ignore texts from unknown numbers entirely. If that’s how subscribers approach any of your messages, you’ve already lost them.

As with anyone on their contact list, your subscribers should always know it’s you who’s texting them. Be sure to announce yourself by mentioning your brand name in every message. Your goal is to build a relationship and establish familiarity.

If your SMS service offers merge/personalized data fields, use them. A personal touch enhances the customer experience and makes your business feel like a welcome friend.

Use information such as purchase history and demographics to target your clients for deals and promotions they’re most likely to respond to. For example, if you own a hair salon, and a client normally comes in for a cut and color every four months, send her a text promotion when it’s time for her next appointment.

If Thursday is your slow day, then you’ve got a double win by booking an appointment on a low-performing day and increasing Sarah’s loyalty by offering her a promotion that’s relevant to her.

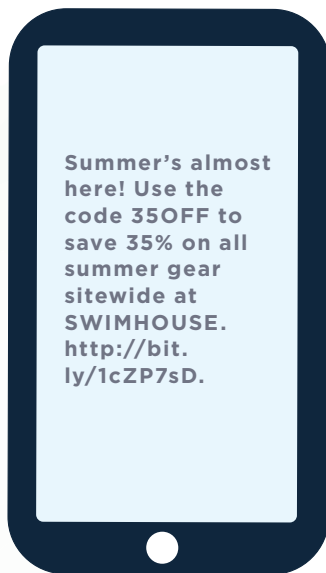


**Hi Sarah, would
you like to book an
appointment for a
cut and color for
this Thursday and
receive 30% off?
cancel.**

Include a Clear Call-To-Action (CTA)

Every message should go out with an intention. In SMS, this translates into a line of text indicating a subscriber's next move.

Typically, an SMS call to action is something like asking the recipients to use a coupon code for their next purchase, asking them to share something with friends, or even simply replying YES to confirm their attendance to your event. Whatever the purpose, make your CTA the focal point of your message.



Your CTA should be to-the-point and simple. Your leads and customers should make total sense of what you're asking them to do and be able to do it in as few steps as possible.

If you're gifting subscribers a coupon code, be clear on where/how to redeem it. If your goal is to get them to reply to a shortcode, say so.

Offer Exclusive Deals

Give your SMS subscribers the VIP treatment. After all, they're loyal enough to have opted in to your SMS campaign, so reward them. There are a number of text marketing strategies that emphasize the exclusivity of your SMS customers. You can use exclusivity for two purposes:

1. Offer an exclusive deal to customers who opt in.
This is a great way to generate interest in your SMS program. Consider this case study about Julep cosmetics retailer. To increase their SMS database, they offered customers 50% off their next nail polish for joining the "Julep Mobile Insider Club." Within 24 hours they had built a mobile customer base of 5,000.
2. Send special offers that aren't available on your other marketing platforms.

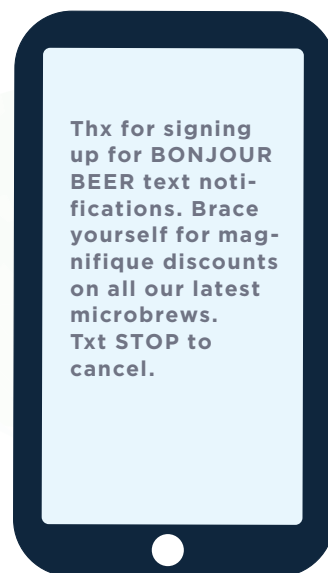
Customers who feel there's a special benefit to being part of your texting campaign will be more likely to participate. For that reason, refrain from sending duplicate offers on your website, social media or email. A Papa John's franchise in the U.K. offered a pizza deal to its 8,100 mobile customers: "Any pizza, any size, including our massive 16"- £6.99 collection or £8.99 delivery." Their overall sales increased by 33%.

Illuminate the Exit Door

There's comfort in spotting an exit door anywhere you go — the more conspicuous the better. Your SMS subscribers will appreciate this most of all.

Make it obvious to your SMS recipients that they have the option to opt out of your SMS campaign at any time. It's a one-step process. Be sure an opt-out shortcode, in all caps, is visible at the end of your outgoing campaigns every so often.

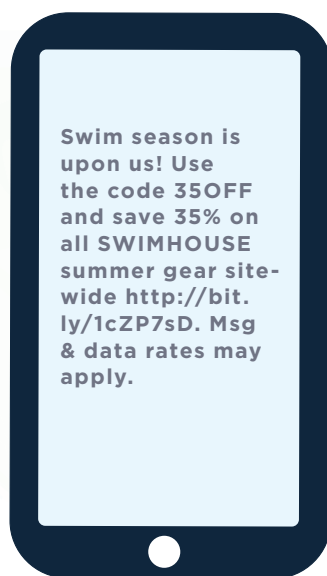
Some SMS marketing providers include opt-out instructions by default while others require you to enter it at your own discretion.



**Thx for signing
up for BONJOUR
BEER text noti-
fications. Brace
yourself for mag-
nifique discounts
on all our latest
microbrews.
Txt STOP to
cancel.**

Tack on a Disclaimer

No two mobile phone plans are the same. Some offer free text messaging, some charge a flat rate, while others charge per SMS message. You might think it's implied; you might assume everyone should already be aware, but for the sake of transparency (and to avoid any backlash) it's smart to tack on a disclaimer at the end of your outbound SMS messages reminding recipients that standard rates may apply.



CHAPTER 4

EXECUTION



Avoid Repetition

As an SMS marketer, it's up to you to break the monotony of intrusive advertising.

Put yourself in your customer's shoes. What would you do if your phone repeatedly rattled your desk with banal material you've already seen ad nauseum? It would get old pretty quickly.

Repeat messages are a total turn-off to the eager consumer. It's one thing to send one-off reminder notifications for events and special offers, but there's nothing tantalizing about stale, repetitive content. If anything, it's an incentive to opt out.



Mind Consistency and Frequency

There is such a thing as too much of a good thing.

Not all your SMS campaigns warrant the same frequency of sends. Whatever you do, don't bombard (or spam) your subscribers with marketing messages. As long as every message you send is of great value to your subscribers, a little extra won't hurt but, unless you've got an insane promotion that demands by-the-hour updates, you might want to take a modest approach.



There is, however, a fine line between annoyance and neglect. Subscribers who haven't heard from you in months are likely to forget who you are or lose interest over time. To maintain a good balance, keep a campaign calendar of what and how often you text your subscribers. Two to four texts a month is a safe, dependable number for your standard campaign.

Again, as long as you've set clear expectations on how often subscribers will hear from you, you shouldn't run into any problems.

Time it Right

When you send is just as important as what you send.

For an optimal success rate of your SMS campaign, consider when your subscribers want to hear from you. Are they a 9-to-5 workday crowd? Are they night owls? Maybe both?

The preferred window of time will vary from business to business, but a good rule of thumb for most is to limit your sending of SMS messages to business hours.



If you sell internationally, segment clients by time zone.

Physical storefront businesses with a window of time can benefit from sending word of a promotion on or before business hours to get buzz going before their doors open.

For most (not all businesses), avoid sending text messages at night. Night time texts all but guarantee little to no traffic to your site from sleepy leads. You'll want to grab their attention when they're up and about for the best engagement.

If you sell internationally, segment clients by time zone. That way they'll receive texts at an appropriate hour with respect to their location.

Plug SMS into a Campaign (and Other Marketing Strategies)

Sure, SMS has high potency as a standalone tactic, but to really unleash its potential, integrate it into your existing marketing campaigns. Audit your marketing channels and assess where SMS can be leveraged in conjunction with other mediums to enhance lead engagement.

For instance, you may send out an email with insider info and follow it up with an SMS reminder directing subscribers to open the email thus boosting your open rate by a significant percentage. You may also use it to direct your audience's attention to relevant social media posts to rouse activity on that front.



Monitor Your Performance

As with any marketing campaign designed to bring in a positive return, there's little opportunity to improve without active reporting. How else are you going to know what's working and what isn't? SMS marketing presents a golden opportunity to track your progress and build better, more targeted campaigns. You can gauge the success rate of your active campaigns by monitoring the following stats as they happen:

- New subscribers
- Clicks per send
- Opt-outs per send
- Total ROI per send

Once you've pinpointed the winning elements leading to the most conversions, modify your messages to improve future performance.

Automate

Automation is the last piece of the puzzle. It's what takes you from marketing amateur to marketing pro. On top of building campaigns and tracking your ROI, with automation you're able to pre-schedule SMS messages to fire in sequence. At the same time, you can program your marketing to react to your subscribers' actions by logging what they do and sending them even more relevant content based on their behavior.

(SMS is one of [ONTRAPORT's](https://ontraport.com) many marketing tools for increased engagement and traffic.)



CHAPTER 5

THE BOTTOM LINE

When you avoid integrating SMS into your marketing, not only are you missing out on guaranteed lead engagement, your customers are missing out on the value you're delivering to the world. It may take some tinkering, but once you've fine-tuned your approach and honed in on your audience, SMS is a goldmine. It's as lucrative as it is cheap; and if you've got it in you to consistently crank out tantalizing content, there's no better way to stay in touch.



ONTRAPORT

ONTRAPORT's mission is to support entrepreneurs in delivering their value to the world by removing the burden of technology. We deliver on that mission by creating software, offering services, and educating the entrepreneurial community.

For over a decade, we have made a difference for thousands of businesses, their community, and our own staff, which is why we've received countless awards for innovation, revenue growth and company culture.



Our flagship marketing automation product is a subscription software that provides our customers with all the tools they need to start and grow their businesses through the advantage of an all-in-one platform. In addition, we also offer a large collection of free resources, courses and educational products that support entrepreneurs at any stage throughout their journey.

[ONTRAPORT.COM](https://ontraport.com)